

THE CRITIC AS ARTIST

37

tale we deny the word that we have spoken, and
pass him; such cruelty being courtesy indeed, for who
more than he who has mercy for the condemned of
God? In the jaws of Lucifer we see the man who sold Christ,
and in the jaws of Lucifer the men who slew Caesar. We
tremble, and come forth to re-behold the stars.
In the land of Purgation the air is freer, and the
holy mountain rises into the pure light of day. There is
peace for us, and for those who for a season abide in it there is
some peace also, though, pale from the poison of the
Maremma, Madonna Pia passes before us, and Ismene, with the
sorrow of earth still lingering about her, is there. Soul after soul
makes us share in some repentance or some joy. He whom
the mourning of his widow taught to drink the sweet
wormwood of pain, teUs us of Nella praying in her lonely bed, and we
learn from the mouth of Buonconte how a single tear may
save a dying sinner from the fiend. Sordello, that noble and
disdainful Lombard, eyes us from afar like a couchant lion.
When he learns that Virgil is one of Mantua's citizens, he
falls upon his neck, and when he learns that he is the singer of
Rome he falls before his feet. In that valley whose grass and
flowers are fairer than cleft emerald and Indian wood, and
brighter than scarlet and silver, they are singing who in the
world were kings; but the lips of Rudolph of Habsburg do
not move to the music of the others, and Philip of France
beats his breast, and Henry of England sits alone. On and on we
go, climbing the marvellous stair, and the stars become
larger than their wont, and the song of the kings grows faint, and
at length we reach the seven trees of gold and the garden of
the Earthly Paradise. In a grifEn-drawn chariot appears one
whose brows are bound with olive, who is veiled in white, and
mantled in green, and robed in a vesture that is coloured
like live fire. The ancient flame wakes within us. Our blood
quicken through terrible pulses. We recognize her. It is Beatrice,
the woman we have worshipped. The ice congealed about our
heart melts. Wild tears of anguish break from us, and we bow
our forehead to the ground, for we know that we have
sinned. When we have done penance, and are purified, and have
drunk of the fountain of Lethe and bathed in the fountain of
Eunoe, the mistress of our soul raises us to the Paradise of
Heaven. Out of that eternal pearl, the moon, the face of

Piccarda leans to us. Her beauty troubles us for a moment, and when, like a thing that falls through water, she passes away, we gaze